

RESISTANCE AND LAND CONTROL ON RAPA NUI

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As Pinochet (1974) explains in *Geopolitica*, national centers invariably strive to control and incorporate territorial peripheries. Making war or genocide on peripheral peoples is one mode of operation, as successfully practised by Saddam Hussein and, earlier, by the United States. Mass transfers of population from center to periphery are another effective measure. The current Chinese Empire has effectively Sinicized its peripheral zones in north, west and south by sheer weight of numbers. Mongolians, Uighurs, Tibetans, and the smaller nations of the south are now outnumbered, in their own homelands, by in-migrant Han Chinese. This common strategy of annexation and control is in vogue across the globe, from Western Sahara (filling up with Moroccans), through the Israeli settlements in Palestine, to the Javanese Empire's *transmigrasi* policy, aimed at changing the ethnic balance in outlying regions of Indonesia.

Since the "Indian Wars" of the late nineteenth century, Chile has followed the same trans-migratory course, in attempts to Chileanize the north, the middle south (Mapuche), Tierra del Fuego, Antarctica and, now, Rapa Nui. Thus in the last two decades the Rapanui have become a minority in their own homeland, of which the bulk of the land surface lies in the hands of the Chilean state. When an ethnic group becomes a minority in what was once its own territory, whether in Canada or Rapa Nui, loss of culture and language results. The end product will be the bland homogeneity envisioned by promoters of globalization. Inevitably, however, these processes will be resisted by the colonized. Resistance covers a wide spectrum, from apparent acquiescence (as a survival mechanism), through peaceful cultural revivals or active protests against externally-planned developments, to aggressive *intifada*. Such forms of resistance, as Muslim clerics tell us, are the weapons of the weak.

Since the 1980s, resistance has been heavily theorized. We'll spare you the theory by citing a summary by Porteous and Smith (2001:226-30), a book which also contains many examples of resistance to airports, freeways, dams, urban renewal, and national parks. Essentially, resistance must be local, though outside helpers and global networking have immense value. Second, resistance should wherever possible be non-violent. And third, "resistance does not normally indulge in nationalistic public interest or common good rhetoric. It is more likely to speak of the good of particular groups or particular localities, or at the other end of the scale, the common good of the global environment" (p.230). In other words, resistance is more particular than general, and more practical than conceptual (Porteous 1996).

THE RAPA NUI EXPERIENCE

RAPA NUI HAS HAD THE USUAL Pacific history: "discovery" and colonization by Europeans; exploitation by privateers (Bornier); missionary interference; annexation; de facto control by a business corporation; military control; and, finally, a

form of democratic connection with a powerful mainland state (Porteous 1981). Equally, the Rapanui have an impressive history of resistance to colonial authority, which may be traced back to the early reactions to gift-giving but trigger-happy European explorers and marauders and personified in the judicious elimination of Dutrou-Bornier. Angata's rebellion of 1914 was much more than the comic opera claimed by Routledge, as was the "quiet revolution" of the 1960s which brought radical institutional changes to Rapa Nui (Delsing 2004). The range of resistance runs from the adoption of foreign cultural traits and intermarriage (McCall 1994) through cultural revival and reinvention, like the annual Tapati festival, to protests against externally-driven development projects. Given the failure of earlier economic enterprises, and the high degree of on-site control of tourism by the Rapanui, it would be expected that projects which endanger the Rapanui concept of an acceptable tourist industry would attract resistance. Further, projects which endanger cultural heritage, on which tourism is predicated, might also expect to attract opposition. Finally, projects which further alienate the Rapanui from control of the land surface of the island, which they naturally claim in totality, must expect concerted protest.

Because the Rapanui are deeply divided on the practicalities of development, and because outside observers and Chilean officials also take up oppositional positions, it is not possible to speak of simple pro-development and anti-development forces (Shephard-Toomey 2002). Nevertheless, it is possible to demonstrate how the project that most Rapanui basically support, namely the return of land ownership and control to Rapanui hands, is changing land management on Rapa Nui. Land on Rapa Nui (16,600 hectares) can be divided into four parts: the Hangaroa urban region; the rural sector; the National Park, chiefly on the island's periphery; and the Vaitea region at the center of the island.

In the *Hangaroa Urban Area* (500 ha.), the only recent project that has generated little opposition is the creation of a new airport terminal, which would clearly benefit the majority. Yet a suggestion that the new control tower should be in the form of a moai led to strong opposition, including a petition. Although some Chilean and Rapanui officials saw the idea as a cultural attraction to tourists, other Rapanui condemned the concept as a vulgar trivialization of their culture. Similarly, loud protests arose when the Chilean Navy attempted to construct a monumental lighthouse near the ceremonial village of Orongo. Not only is another lighthouse not needed, but the projected one would not easily be seen from the north and east and, most damningly, would detract from the visual aesthetics of Orongo, one of the prime cultural and tourist sites on the island. A march to the mayor's residence helped stall this construction in 1992. Nothing daunted, the Navy announced plans to erect another huge lighthouse on the summit of Maunga O'tu'u in 1998. This was also generally opposed on the grounds that its goal was merely the geopolitical glory and gratification of the Chilean state, that it had no

practical or cultural value, and that it would be out of scale on a low-rise island.

Plans for new port facilities have always been controversial, notably when in 1995 the Chilean Ministry of Defense proposed a new port at La Pérouse on the north coast. In response to this proposal, local factions quickly arose. Supporters very reasonably claimed that such a new port would improve cargo handling and facilitate cruise ship docking. Opponents countered with several claims. First, a large port would result in social and environmental damage to the island. Second, the island will never be equipped to deal with mass loads of containers or cruise ship tourists, neither of which will bring significant economic benefit. Third, and most important, the proposed site is close to Anakena, in an area characterized by an array of very significant archaeological sites. Improving tourist access to a degraded heritage environment is seen as a bad strategy. Opponents also suggest that it would be cheaper, more convenient, and less damaging to upgrade the existing port at Hanga Piko. Again, the Chilean Navy is blamed by some for its apparently endless interest in vanity projects.

The most crucial recent land issue for the residents of Hangaroa, however, has been the return of land ownership from the state to individual Rapanui. Original Rapanui land rights, never strong after the Rapanui were confined to Hangaroa in the late nineteenth century, were finally extinguished in 1933 when the Chilean government inscribed the entirety of Rapa Nui as state property (Rochna-Ramirez 1996). The first national park was proclaimed at about this time. From the 1960s, however, successive national governments have delivered land titles to parcels in the Hangaroa area. After the enactment of the *Ley Indígena* in 1994 the vexed question of the return of title to land parcels outside Hangaroa became the major land issue on the island. Yet even the "return" of the land is contested: some Rapanui argue that Chile cannot return land which it did not originally own.

It would seem that land in the *Rural Sector* (4,311 ha.) would be the most amenable to reassignment of ownership from the state to ethnic Rapanui. Land already delivered has been used primarily for housing, tourism, or agricultural purposes. By 2000 the view from the slopes of Rano Kau showed a "Greater Hangaroa" spreading north and east from its original confines into the peripheral rural areas. Nevertheless, there are complaints that the land has been turned over in an unplanned, haphazard way, with little analysis of land capability. Some Rapanui have found themselves with land useless for agriculture, others with parcels containing archaeological sites.

Greater controversy arose when plans emerged in the late 1990s to redistribute land from within the *National Park* (7066 ha.), which is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Some Rapanui and Chilean officials argue that, given the already long waiting list for land parcels, up to 425 ha. of park land could be parcelled out to individuals. Only land that does not contain archaeological sites would be redistributed. Adversaries contend that the protection of the park's integrity is absolutely essential for the protection of archaeological heritage and for the long-term prosperity of tourism: "It is the resource for our survival." Although there appears to be strong support for maintaining park integrity, some Rapanui have

already begun to graze animals and to build houses within the park. A minority believe that the park is itself simply another institutional structure imposed on the islanders by foreigners and Chileans who accept without question the cultural baggage of the Western world.

But the greatest contention of all lies in the future of the central rural estate known as *Fundo Vaitea* (4,723 ha.).

THE PROBLEM OF VAITEA

LOCATED IN THE CENTER of the island, Vaitea is currently uninhabited and is administered by the Chilean agency SASIPA (Agricultural and Services Society of Easter Island). Although it contains good farm land, this sector remains little used, by SASIPA except for fruit production and a small cattle ranch. No land-use plan currently exists, but it is expected that the land may be redistributed as parcels, one area being retained for the development of tourist facilities. The future of Vaitea is especially interesting because of the diversity of opinion among islanders and mainland officials alike about its development potential. There are four major scenarios.

Rural Development (Homesteading)

Aside from the opportunity to live in or develop the Vaitea area, many Rapanui feel that the return of the land to their ownership will vindicate their claims to ancestral land. It is pointed out that many parcels already delivered have not been developed. Indeed, the Rapanui associate land with ownership more than with development potential: "They simply want [to be] recognized as owners of the land." Nevertheless, there is a general consensus that land delivered at Vaitea would chiefly be used for the construction of homes, as well as for agriculture and livestock. One problem with the release of land to individual ownership is likely to be a lack of planning or management strategies for the area. Coupled with lack of financial resources on the part of new landowners, the result could be a disorganized settlement of makeshift housing on the lines of a "shantytown." The latter scenario, however, is a minority view.

Urban Development (Central City)

A minority of Rapanui feel that Vaitea would be an excellent site for concentrated urban development. The area already has roads and some utility lines in place. Ideologically, a second town would give the Rapanui an opportunity to remove themselves from the institutional colonial settlement pattern of Hangaroa, to which area they were confined until 1966. The majority, however, feel that no second town is necessary because there remains ample land for urban development on the periphery of Hangaroa, as well as opportunities for further moderate vertical development within the town. Further, a second town would demand a costly infrastructure. Finally, there appears to be general agreement that urban facilities outside Hangaroa would be detrimental to the current tourist experience.

Large-scale Agriculture (The Plantation)

A second minority opinion suggests that much of Vaitea could be devoted to large-scale subtropical fruit and vegetable production for export. This idea has been current for almost a

century (Porteous 1981). The great advantage would be to diversify the island's economy and generate occupations unconnected with tourism, although, of course, local and tourist needs could also be supplied. The majority, however, believe that a restricted labor force, lack of local agrarian expertise, and extreme distances from even the nearest markets in Santiago and Tahiti, militate against business agriculture. The consensus is that agriculturalists should first concentrate on serving local and tourist needs, thus reducing the current reliance on imported produce. In short, the future of small-scale non-subsistence agriculture should be strongly linked with the tourist industry.

Tourism Development (The Pleasure Dome)

Tourism continues to be the most important economic activity on Rapa Nui. Tourist-based development is therefore a strong option for Vaitea. CORFO's *Programa de Desarrollo Productivo Isla de Pascua* (2000) states that one of the main objectives for future economic development is to diversify tourism activities. At Vaitea, for example, new landowners could engage in alternative types of tourism such as ethnotourism, agrotourism, ecotourism and adventure tourism. Tourists could escape Hangaroa, stay longer on the island, and experience Rapa Nui through hiking, biking, or horseback riding. In combination with rural and small-scale agricultural development, this is probably one of the best alternatives for the future of Vaitea.

Nevertheless, newspaper reports of a possible large resort development surfaced in the 1990s. Some Rapanui and Chilean officials support such a resort, which would be the island's first large-scale tourist development project. They argue that such a project would create employment, motivate tourists to stay longer, attract tourists who prefer five-star hotels with their associated swimming pools and golf courses, and generate income which could be used for public services and heritage restoration. The majority disagree, citing the negative experiences of other Pacific islands. First, no such development could occur without foreign capital, which would immediately change the economic character of Rapa Nui tourism, which is almost wholly in Rapanui hands. Second, it is felt that any large-scale economic partnerships would financially benefit only a few islanders rather than serving the entire community. Others feel that the resort would be managed by non-Rapanui, leaving islanders only the menial resort occupations. Few islanders welcome foreign involvement in the tourism industry or the dependency that would be the likely outcome. Indeed, as stout resisters of dependency, the Rapanui deplore the location of the proposed resort in Vaitea, the good agricultural land of which is as yet to be redistributed. Thus rumours of resorts have further contributed to the ongoing resistance to the land-use decisions of the Chilean government.

FUTURES

OUR 2020 VISION FOR VAITEA foresees a 15-story hotel tower rising above an 18-hole golf course and a graded set of swimming pools. Nearby, in the forest of *Jubaea* palms, and in good Old Sturbridge Village style, Rapanui actors reenact their ancestors' pre-contact lives between 10 am and 6 pm.

Exciting evening stage shows culminate, to everyone's delight, in the symbolic toppling of moai and the chopping of the last tree. Such a vision may elicit delight, derision or resistance.

Despite their ancestral rights to land, many Rapanui feel strongly that they lack control over both land ownership and land-use decisions on the island. Most of Rapa Nui is still administered by CONAF (National Park) and SASIPA (Vaitea), and few Rapanui are involved in this management. As with native peoples elsewhere (Halseth 1996), resistance and contest regarding land-use planning initiatives is not merely a fight to gain ownership of, or development rights to land, but is fundamentally a fight to wrest local decision-making power from the hands of outsiders. Like all rooted peoples, the Rapanui are concerned about the future of their community and the nature of their "place." The wide variety of Rapanui and Chilean stakeholders involved in current development processes, and their mutually contradictory beliefs and concerns, has been instrumental in creating conflicts concerning the future of land development on Rapa Nui. Furthermore, the dominance of the Chilean state and its geopolitical objectives, in conjunction with a lack of regard for Rapanui values, will ensure that active resistance will continue to be a part of Rapa Nui's socio-political future.

NOTE

The empirical findings of this article are derived from Shephard-Toomey's extensive fieldwork on Rapa Nui during the period 2000-2001, and a fieldwork visit by Porteous in 2000. Shephard-Toomey's research was based on official documents, newspaper reports, and interviews with a wide range of both Rapanui and other Chilean officials, as well as persons with strong interests in island development.

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